DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 260 970 SO 016 751

TITLE	Alfred Nobel and the Nobel Prizes. Fact Sheets on Sweden.
INSTITUTION	Swedish Inst., Stockholm.
PUB DATE	Aug 84
NOTE	4p.
AVAILABLE FROM	Swedish Institute, P.O. Box 7434, S-103 91, Stockholm, Sweden (free).
PUB TYPE	Viewpoints (120)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Awards; Biographies; Chemistry; Economics; *European History; Global Approach; Literature; Medicine; Peace; Personality; Physics; Physiology
IDENTIFIERS	Fact Sheets; *Nobel (Alfred); *Nobel Prizes; Sweden

ABSTRACT

The life and personality of Alfred Nobel and the Nobel Prizes established by his will are discussed. Nobel was a 19th century Swedish industrialist who was fluent in six languages. He invented dynamite. At his death in 1896, his estate amounted to $9,200,000. His will stipulated that the income from his estate should be divided annually into five equal parts and distributed as prizes to those who during the preceding year had conferred the greatest benefit on mankind. The fields embraced by the prizes reflect Nobel's personal interests: physics, chemistry, physiology or medicine, literature, and peace. The Nobel Foundation was organized as legatee and administrator of the Nobel fund capital, while the various bodies named in the will agreed to award the prizes. The Bank of Sweden, at its tercentenary in 1968, instituted a Prize in Economic Sciences, pledging an annual amount to the Nobel Foundation equal to one of the regular Nobel Prizes. Candidates for the Nobel Prizes must be proposed by qualified individuals or groups. Special committees examine the proposals and announce the winners in mid-October of each year. Presentation ceremonies are held in Sweden and in Norway in December. (RM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED260970

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☒ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Katrin Jonsson

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ALFRED NOBEL AND THE NOBEL PRIZES

August 1984

Swedish Institute
P.O. Box 7434
S-103 91, Stockholm
Sweden

SP 016 751

Fact Sheets on Sweden

Alfred Nobel and the Nobel Prizes

Alfred Nobel, nineteenth-century Swedish industrialist and creator of the prizes that bear his name, was the inventor of dynamite. This explosive has played and continues to play an important role in the industrial development of the world.

The use of dynamite has increased the supply of iron ore and other minerals needed for the increased construction of machines, locomotives, railroad cars and motor vehicles. It has also facilitated the construction of railroads and highways across the continents and thereby allowed mass distribution of goods. Through his invention, Nobel was thus a benefactor of mankind, just as he stipulated that the winners of the prizes established by his will should be.

Life and Personality

Born in Stockholm in 1833 of Swedish parents, Nobel moved with his family to St. Petersburg, then the capital of Russia, when he was only nine. He lived in several countries after that and ultimately came to regard himself as a citizen of the world. Even so, he never gave up his Swedish citizenship.

By virtue of the education he received in many countries, Nobel read, spoke and wrote fluently in six European languages: Swedish, French, English, German, Italian and Russian. His numerous handwritten letters demonstrate his remarkable proficiency in all of them. He perfected his French when sent to Paris by his father in his late teens to study chemistry. His letters in French are particularly elegant. Those in English sometimes bear traces of the early nineteenth-century style generally associated with Byron and Shelley (his two favorite poets) and are remarkably free of grammatical and idiomatic errors. To his mother he always wrote in Swedish, which is also the language of the will he composed in Paris. The fields embraced by the prizes stipulated by the will reflect Nobel's personal interests. While he provided no prizes for architects, artists, composers or social scientists, he was generous to those working in physics, chemistry, physiology and medicine—the subjects he knew best himself, and in which he expected the greatest advances.

Throughout his life he suffered from poor health and often took cures at watering places, "less to drink the water than to rest." But he expected great improvements in medicine, and the profession has since realized many of them. Once he employed a young Swedish physiologist in Paris to test his own theories on blood transfusions. Although these efforts were not successful, problems related to transfusions were later solved by an Austrian, Karl Landsteiner, who won the 1930 Nobel Prize in Physiology or Medicine.

The Nobel Prize in Literature, too, reflects the donor's personal predilections. From his early youth he had been a writer as well as an avid reader, but he later destroyed many of his adolescent poems written in Swedish. He did, however, save a long autobiographical poem in English and occasionally gave copies of it to intimate friends. He was always an omnivorous reader of books in all the languages he knew. What he meant by the stipulation in his will of an "idealistic tendency" is shown by the books and authors he liked best. At the very time he composed his final will in 1895, he wrote enthusiastic letters about authors, among them Sweden's Selma Lagerlöf, who in 1909 was to become the first woman to receive the Prize in Literature.

Nobel's award for peace workers was just as personally motivated. His special recommendation of "organizers and promoters of peace congresses" shows that he had in mind his friend Baroness Bertha von Suttner of Austria, whose peace congresses in Rome and Berne he had supported financially. While he had been concerned about the peace problem long before he ever met her, she undoubtedly stimulated his interest in it still further. In 1905 Baroness von Suttner won the Peace Prize.

A question often asked is, "Why was Norway picked to award the Peace Prize?" Nobel himself gave no reason. It should be remembered, however, that during his lifetime, Sweden and Norway were still joined in a union; this was peacefully dissolved in 1905. When Nobel drew up his will, it may have been only natural for him to divide the prize-awarding responsibilities between the two parts of his homeland. A contributing reason may also have been his admiration for the great Norwegian writer and patriot Björnstierne Björnson, winner of the Prize in Literature in 1903.

The selection of Peace Prize winners was entrusted to a committee appointed by the *Storting*, or Norwegian Parliament. As a member of the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences in Stockholm, Nobel thought it the appropriate body for the selection of laureates in physics and chemistry. Selection of winners of the Prize in Physiology or Medicine was delegated to Karolinska Institutet in Stockholm, on which he had heard good reports. As for the Swedish Academy, which he put in charge of the Prize in Literature, Nobel may not have been so familiar with it, but he undoubtedly assumed that as a counterpart of the French Academy it was best qualified for the difficult task of selecting the laureates in literature.

The Nobel Prizes

Experience had taught Nobel to dislike and distrust lawyers, and late in 1895 he made out his final will without any professional advice or assistance. This will, which replaced two previous ones made in 1889 and 1893, stipulated that the income from his estate, which on his death in 1896 amounted to $9,200,000, should be divided annually into five equal parts and distributed "in the form of prizes to those who during the preceding year have conferred the greatest benefit on mankind." He prescribed that the prizes should be distributed as follows:

"One part to the person or persons who shall have made the most important discovery or invention in the field of physics; one part to the person who shall have made the most important chemical discovery or improvement; one part to the person who shall have made the most

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Number of prizes awarded 1901—1983 (divided or jointly awarded prizes counted as one)

	Total number of prizes	Total number of laureates
Physics	78	123
Chemistry	75	100
Physiology or Medicine	76	136
Literature	76	80
Peace	64	83

	Total number of prizes	Total number of laureates
Economics (1969—83)	15	21

important discovery in the domain of physiology or medicine; one part to the person who shall have produced in the field of literature the most outstanding work of an idealistic tendency, and one part to the person who shall have done the most or the best work for fraternity between nations, for the abolition or reduction of standing armies and for holding and promotion of peace congresses." His will also prescribes that in the distribution of the prizes "no consideration whatever shall be given to the nationality of the candidates, but that the most worthy shall receive the prize, whether he is a Scandinavian or not."

Legally, however, the will did not actually bequeath the estate itself to anyone, and when it was read in January 1897, it was strongly contested by some of his relatives. Furthermore, Nobel had not approached the different institutions concerned to ascertain if they were willing to assume responsibility for awarding the prizes. Politicians criticized the idea on the whole, and King Oscar II of Sweden and Norway was sceptical of it for various reasons. More than three years elapsed before the matter was finally settled, and it was then decided to organize the Nobel Foundation as legatee and administrator of the Nobel fund capital while the various bodies named in the will agreed to undertake the responsibility of awarding the prizes. A decisive role in securing the final victory by the establishing in 1900 of the Nobel Foundation was played by Nobel's young collaborator, Ragnar Sohlman, who was named by Nobel Executor of the Will. Sohlman later became the Executive Director of the Foundation.

The Nobel Institutions

There are five special Nobel Committees attached to the prize-awarding bodies

Prizes	*Prize-awarding bodies*
Physics	The Royal Academy of Sciences
Chemistry	The Royal Academy of Sciences
Physiology or Medicine	The Nobel Assembly of Karolinska Institutet
Literature	The Swedish Academy
Peace	The Norwegian Nobel Committee

(including the Norwegian Parliament). Each of these Committees has five members, and each Committee may call upon other outside experts for additional advice.

The joint administrative body is the Nobel Foundation in Stockholm. The principal task of its Board of Directors is to administer the funds and other properties deriving from Alfred Nobel's estate.

The Prize in Economic Sciences

The Bank of Sweden, at its tercentenary in 1968, instituted The Bank of Sweden Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel, pledging an annual amount to the Nobel Foundation equal to one of the regular Nobel Prizes. The winner of the Prize in Economic Sciences is to be chosen each year by the Swedish Royal Academy of Sciences. Nobel Prize rules are followed regarding nomination of candidates, prize adjudication and decision, and prize presentation.

The Process of Selection

Those qualified to propose candidates for prizes are: previous Nobel Laureates in their respective fields; members of the prize-awarding bodies and of the Nobel Committees in the relevant spheres; professors in the various fields either at specific universities or to be selected through special invitation by the respective prize-awarding bodies; chairmen of representative authors' organizations (literature); members of certain international parliamentary or legal organizations (peace); members of parliaments and governments (peace). Anyone proposing himself for a Nobel Prize is automatically disqualified. It should be observed that only *individuals* belonging to these bodies have the right to propose a candidate—not the organization as such. Since neither the Swedish nor the Norwegian authorities have any influence whatsoever on the prize decisions, no official representation or support in favor of a certain candidate is of any avail.

The Committees examine the proposals which have to be at their disposal before February 1, and by early autumn their reports are submitted to the respective prize-awarding bodies. After the merits of the candidates have been discussed, the bodies announce their final decisions in mid-October. All proceedings of the prize-awarding bodies are secret.

The Presentation Ceremonies

The Nobel Prizes in physics, chemistry, medicine, literature and the Prize in Economic Sciences are presented to the laureates by H.M. the King at a ceremony in the Stockholm Concert Hall on December 10, the anniversary of Alfred Nobel's death in 1896 at San Remo, Italy. The Peace Prize presentation takes place on the same day at the University of Oslo. Each laureate receives a Nobel Gold Medal, a Nobel Diploma and a check for the prize money, which varies according to the net income of the fund capital. In recent years, the dollar value of the Nobel Prizes has grown to more than $230,000 per prize. The awards are widely recognized as the world's highest civic honors. Besides spurring recipients and possible candidates to new efforts, they have served to make scientific and literary achievements, as well as humanitarian contributions, much more widely known than would otherwise have been the case.

Bibliography:

Bergengren, Erik, *Alfred Nobel.* Thomas Nelson & Sons Ltd., Edinburgh, 1962 (obtainable from the Nobel Foundation).

Nobel, the Man and His Prizes. American Elsevier Publishing Company, New York, 1972.

Sohlman, Ragnar, *The Legacy of Alfred Nobel.* The Bodley Head, London, 1983.

Ståhle, Nils K, *Alfred Nobel and the Nobel Prizes.* The Swedish Institute, Stockholm, 1978.

Wilhelm, Peter, *The Nobel Prize.* Teknowledge AB, Stockholm, 1983.

For further information please contact:

The Swedish Embassy or **Consulate** in your country (in the U.S.:
The Swedish Information Service,
825 Third Ave., New York, N.Y. 10022)

The Swedish Institute

Mailing address:	Office:
Box 7434	Sverigehuset
S-103 91 Stockholm	(Sweden House)
Sweden	Kungsträdgården
	Stockholm

This fact sheet is produced as part of the Swedish information service abroad, and is intended to be used for reference purposes. It may be freely used in preparing articles, speeches, broadcasts, etc. No acknowledgment is necessary. Please note the date of publication.

LiberKartor Stockholm HORDISKA TRYCKERI AB